

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 COME-00 TRSE-00 NSC-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 FEAE-00 AGRE-00 EB-08 AID-05 SP-02

STR-04 XMB-02 /062 W

-----031287 011741Z /53

R 011030Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9918

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY BISSAU

AMEMJRP Y BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHO

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EGEN, ECIN, XY, US

SUBJ: ECOWAS

REF: STATE 159681

RESPONSES ARE KEYED TO QUESTIONS POSED PARA 2 REFTEL:

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A. PRINCIPAL CONCERNS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S
REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) REVOLVE AROUND BENINESE REVOLUTION
AND MAINTENANCE OF POWER BY KEREKOU REGIME. WHILE BENIN GIVES
STRONG VERBAL SUPPORT TO GOALS AND PRINCIPLES OF ECOWAS, EMBASSY
DOUBTS THAT GPRB WILL BE ABLE TO SHIFT FOCUS FROM DOMESTIC
PROBLEMS IN ORDER TO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO ECOWAS
IN NEAR FUTURE.

B. BENIN IS ESSENTIALLY A MARGINAL OR NON-ACTIVE MEMBER IN PRESENT REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS CEAO. IT IS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON ITS MEMBERSHIP IN THE UMOA (WEST AFRICAN MONETARY UNION), BUT THIS MEMBERSHIP IS UNDERWRITTEN BY FRANCE AND OTHER MEMBER STATES. MORE IMPORTANTLY, BENIN'S ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP WITH NIGERIA WILL BE THE DECIDING FACTOR, OVERRIDING ANY REGIONAL FRANCOPHONE AFFILIATIONS.

C. AS BENIN ENJOYS THE BENEFITS OF CFA FRANC, WE DO NOT FORESEE ANY PROBLEMS IN CURRENCY EXCHANGES ON THE BENINESE SIDE. BENIN'S RESPONSE TO REGIONAL PROBLEMS OF THIS NATURE WILL BE DICTATED BY OTHER UMOA MEMBERS WITH STRONGER ECONOMIES AND NIGERIA. WEST AFRICAN CLEARING HOUSE THUS HAS A POTENTIAL ROLE.

D. BENIN RECENTLY INAUGURATED FIRST DIRECT TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH LINK WITH NIGERIA, BUT NEW SYSTEM IS PLAGUED WITH TECHNICAL PROBLEMS, AND IS NOT YET READY TO SERVE AS CONDUIT FOR COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN OTHER FRANCOPHONE STATES AND NIGERIA. SIMILARLY, USAID-FINANCED COTONOU BRIDGE, WHICH OUGHT TO ELIMINATE MAJOR COASTAL ROAD BOTTLENECK IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION BUT WILL NOT BE FINISHED UNTIL 1980. AS NIGERIA'S WESTERN NEIGHBOR, GPRB IS AWARE THAT BENIN WILL DOUBTLESS HAVE IMPORTANT ROLE IN TELECOMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE OF ECOWAS.

E AND F. BENIN'S TRADE STRUCTURE IS COMPLEMENTARY TO THAT OF NIGERIA AND COMPETITIVE WITH THOSE OF TOGO AND GHANA. INDEED, COTONOU PORT REVENUES JUMP WITH EACH CLOSURE OF BORDER WITH TOGO. BENIN ALSO DELIGHTS IN CREATING CUSTOMS AND DOCUMENT-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TATION PROBLEMS FOR TOGOLESE AND GHANAIA TRUCKS IN TRANSIT TO NIGERIA. BEYOND QUESTIONS OF TRANSPORT OF IMPORTS, BENIN'S DOMESTIC ECONOMY, MAINLY FOODSTUFF AGRICULTURE DESPITE GPRB EFFORTS TO DEVELOP EXPORT CROPS, COULD BECOME HIGHLY COMPLEMENTARY WITH THOSE OF ITS NEIGHBORS IF PROPERLY MANAGED.

BENIN, THROUGH SMUGGLING, ALREADY SUPPLIES FOODSTUFFS TO TOGO AND WESTERN NIGERIA. EFFORTS TO ENFORCE LOW PRICES FOR FOODSTUFFS TEND TO DEPRESS PRODUCTION DESPITE PRODUCTIVITY CAMPAIGNS. EMBASSY DOES NOT SEE ANY EVIDENCE THAT GPRB WILL TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TO CORRECT THIS TREND.

G. GPRB RESTRICTS INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT FINANCES, BUT EMBASSY GUESSES THAT BENIN WILL BE ABLE TO MEET ITS COMMITMENTS. POSSIBILITY EXISTS, HOWEVER, THAT GPRB WILL BE RECALCITRANT IN THIS REGARD OWING TO POOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND TENDENCY TO REGARD ITSELF AS A BENEFICIARY (NOT A CONTRIBUTOR) IN ANY COOPERATIVE EFFORT.

H. GPRB IS VERY DEPENDENT ON TRADE-RELATED TAX REVENUE. SUCH REVENUE AMOUNTED TO 45 PERCENT OF TOTAL FOR 1974 BUDGET (LAST FOR WHICH WE HAVE ACCURATE STATISTICS).

I. EMBASSY SEES POTENTIAL PROBLEM FOR BENIN WITH FUND MECHANISM OWING TO PRESENT DEPENDENCY ON CUSTOMS REVENUES. CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEMBER STATES WILL BE USED THROUGH FUND TO FINANCE GPRB,

WHICH BECAUSE OF ITS MARXIST OPTION HAS SHOWN ITSELF TO BE
UNCOOPERATIVE IN REGIONAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS. MUCH DEPENDS ON
NIGERIA'S ROLE AS POTENTIAL MEDIATOR.

J. WHILE BENIN WILL FOLLOW NIGERIA'S LEAD, BECAUSE OF THE DIFF-
ERENCES IN POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND IDEOLOGIES, IT IS DIFFICULT
FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT TO ENVISAGE THE REGIONAL COHESION THAT
WILL BE NECESSARY TO MAKE ECOWAS A SUCCESS.

K. YES

L. EMBASSY EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER REGIONAL AID EFFORTS (E.G.
ENTENTE FUND) WOULD INDICATE THAT FUND WOULD NOT BE OPTIMUM
VEHICLE FOR AID, AT LEAST IN BENIN. THOMPSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC COOPERATION, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 01-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977COTON001245
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770275-0281
Format: TEL
From: COTONOU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197708111/aaaadqxt.tel
Line Count: 126
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 896bb350-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 159681
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1437676
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ECOWAS
TAGS: EGEN, ECIN, PORG, XY, US, DM, ECOWAS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/896bb350-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009